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Portrayals of the British militia, 1852-1916

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Abstract

This article explores how perceived inefficiencies and inadequacies in the militia were reflected in contemporary works of fiction and satire. The militia's public image was consistently poor: half-trained battalions, staffed by inefficient senior officers, chronically short of subalterns and recruiting from the very worst elements of the working class. It suffered from the combined flaws of both regulars and Volunteers, but was unable to benefit from either the Christian 'civilising mission' of the regulars or the earnest patriotic enthusiasm of the Volunteers. This negative image contributed to the ease with which the force was abolished after the Boer War.

Though they prided themselves on avoiding the excesses of continental militarism, the British public of the early twentieth century made its opinions on military topics more than clear. The National Service League fought a long-running campaign for the adoption of conscription, while a sudden but widespread demand for more dreadnoughts forced the government to double its building programme.¹ A generation earlier, when the Childers reforms threatened Scottish regimental identity, public opinion had spoken out in favour of tradition against efficiency.² Yet in 1907, the effective abolition of Britain's oldest auxiliary military force was greeted with little more than apathy, a phenomenon which reveals much about the popular context in which government schemes for militia reform and its eventual abolition were framed.

Britain's 'constitutional' militia, moribund since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, owed its mid-nineteenth century revival to both the contemporary liberal zeal for reforming antiquated institutions and the influence of increasing tension with Napoleon III's France. Despite taking many hours of parliamentary debate and causing the resignation of a prime minister, the English militia's reconstruction as a part-time volunteer auxiliary force seemed to promise a hopeful future. However, a mere two years later, the

¹ T. Bowman and M. Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902-1914* (Oxford, 2012), pp.154, 156-9

² I.S. Kelly, *Echoes of Success: Identity and the Highland Regiments* (Boston, 2015), pp.57-9

Crimean War stretched the British military to breaking point. The militia was called on not only to protect Britain from invasion, but to garrison Britain's Mediterranean possessions as well as to provide casualty replacements for the regulars: three uncomplimentary roles which it would retain for the rest of the century.³

The militia never completely fulfilled the hopes reposed in it at its foundation. Radical political aspirations of the 'disarmed' English people having 'restor[ed] to it its arms and its honour' were absorbed by the subsequent Rifle Volunteer movement or by support for conscription, leaving the militia as a reflection of a hierarchical, aristocratic Britain that was increasingly ceasing to exist.⁴ Militarily, it never fully reconciled its requirements both to bulk out the chronically undermanned regular army and to provide efficient units for colonial as well as home defence. During the Boer War, the force was considered

³ The Scottish and Irish militias were revived in 1854 to provide drafts, but thereafter performed the same roles as the English militia: I.F.W. Beckett, *Britain's Part-Time Soldiers: The Amateur Military Tradition 1558-1945* (Barnsley, 2011) p.153

⁴ *The Leader*, 16 Dec. 1854; its hopes for 'a further extension of the voluntary spirit... repealing the Drilling Act, and permitting the enrolment... of volunteer regiments' (14 June 1856) were largely met in 1859. See also I.F.W. Beckett, *Riflemen Form: A Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement 1859-1908* (Barnsley, 2007) pp.146-47; M. Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left 1902- 1914* (Basingstoke, 2013) pp.112-5, 127. For those unfamiliar with the distinction between the two part-time forces, the Rifle Volunteers trained predominantly on evenings and weekends at drill halls distributed throughout their regimental district, while the militia came up for annual training in a battalion camp lasting about a month. The Rifle Volunteers were created through local initiative while the militia were controlled and organized more centrally, though the former came increasingly under government control as the period went on. Another key distinction, and one which underpins much of this article, is that the Volunteers tended to recruit from the middle classes and artisans while the militia tended to recruit from unskilled labourers.

unsuitable for service in formed units on the front lines: however, it provided 87,815 individual reinforcements for the regular army in South Africa and sixty-eight of its 124 battalions for second-line and garrison duties overseas.⁵ These were not negligible contributions, four decades after the force had last been called on so heavily: even the German Army did not expect its much better-trained reserve units to fight on the front lines, until dire strategic necessity forced its hand.⁶ However, the debate after the war was focused on the militia's weaknesses rather than its achievements.

Successive Conservative governments struggled with the problem of rendering the force effective until the arrival of the Liberals in 1905 brought Richard Haldane to the War Office.⁷ Haldane envisaged a two-tier army of regulars and volunteers, which required the militia to merge with one of the two forces. Despite multiple revisions to his proposals, he was unable to entice senior militia officers to abandon their faith in the militia's quasi-independence. When the colonels eventually concluded they would rather see their units abolished than altered, Haldane swept the force away altogether. Its replacement, the Special Reserve, was relegated to the responsibility of feeding

⁵ Beckett, *Amateur Military Tradition* pp.200-201.

⁶ E.D. Brose, *The Kaiser's Army: The Politics of Military Technology in Germany During the Machine Age, 1870-1918* (Oxford, 2001), pp.158, 189, 194

⁷ R. Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy 1899-1915* (1991), pp.45-55; E.M. Spiers, *Haldane: An Army Reformer* (Edinburgh, 1980), pp.83-4, 86-7; Beckett, *Amateur Military Tradition* pp.216-7.

individual reinforcements to the regulars: the augmented Rifle Volunteers, now the Territorial Force, would defend Britain.

The militia colonels put up a stern fight to save their units, but this battle was conducted almost exclusively in elite spaces: publicly in the Houses of Parliament, privately in the corridors of power (and, in one case, at Lord Derby's seat of Knowsley).⁸ It seems to have garnered little support from the foremost organs of the press, with the *Times* urging the colonels to abandon their opposition to Haldane and the *Daily Mail* criticising the hybrid nature of the militia which the Duke of Bedford, speaking as a colonel, had praised.⁹ Those papers which did endorse the militia were muted: the influential provincial daily *Yorkshire Post* admitted 'nobody pretends that the force is in a satisfactory condition' and that its Boer War contingents 'may not have been of the highest type'.¹⁰ Indeed, although the *Spectator* argued for the militia's expansion, it simultaneously organised a £3500 experiment designed not just to improve the militia's training, but to fundamentally reshape its social basis.¹¹ But why did even the militia's defenders seem to think so little of it? The answer

⁸ Williams, pp. 47-50; Spiers, *Haldane* pp.87-9

⁹ *Times*, 10 Apr. 1907, 29 May 1907, 18 June 1907, 8 July 1907; *Daily Mail*, 17 June 1907; Duke of Bedford, House of Lords Debates vol. 171 cc. 1221- 1223, 21 March 1907

¹⁰ *Yorkshire Post*, 5 March 1907

¹¹ *Spectator*, 17 Feb. 1906, 21 July 1906, 15 Sept. 1906

seems to have lain not just in the pure military sphere, where the militia had by no means disgraced itself, but in the wider social and political context.

This article seeks to explore the place of the revived militia in the public consciousness through its representation in works of fiction and satire. These sources are drawn primarily, though not exclusively, from the wealth of recently digitised works of the late Victorian and Edwardian era, from collections including the Gale Cengage Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals database, the Victorian Plays Project, the JISC British Library Nineteenth Century Historical Texts platform, and the Bodleian Library Broadside Ballads Online collection. Keyword and full text searches of these resources were supplemented with more detailed examinations of pertinent sources such as invasion literature. The material examined spanned the full range of the period, with the earliest work dating from 1853 and the latest in 1920, though the bulk of references came from the period between 1870 and 1900. Though this partially reflects a growth in the quantity of source material, it also perhaps reflects a heightened increase in the militia after the Franco-Prussian War and the Cardwell Reforms put the role of Britain's auxiliary forces under significant public scrutiny.

The picture of the militia which these works presented will be analysed in two ways. As well as highlight the ways in which these portrayals reflected contemporary perceptions of the militia's strengths and deficiencies, it will also suggest that these portrayals reinforced such perceptions in the minds of the readers. As will be shown, literary depictions of the militia gave greater publicity to negative than to positive characteristics of the force. The force's senior officers, though socially respectable, were seen as incompetent; the subalterns were either preoccupied with securing easy passage into the regulars or lived lives of immorality and financial irresponsibility; the rank and file were the dregs of the unskilled working class. Ineffective training and the unprepossessing quality of its officers and men (the factors on which the *Spectator* fixated) gave the force a reputation of being utterly unprepared to take the field against potential foreign foes.

In turn, this provides two significant insights into the wider debate over the Victorian military. Firstly, it shows that the phenomenon of Victorian militarism was dependent not just on the outward forms of military life such as uniforms, drums and serried ranks, all of which the militia possessed in quantity, but on a semi-rational assessment of wider military and social value in which the militia suffered by comparison to other forces. Secondly, it provides a qualified rebuttal to the idea that we can unpick the growth of Victorian

militarism from any wider development of imperialism.¹² Although the image of the regular army improved over the course of the period, many of the tropes formerly used to criticize it either remained with or were transferred to the militia.¹³ Victorian depictions of the militia had evolved little from those of the seventeenth seventies, when representations started ‘clustering around four main “types”: corpulent old gentlemen; foppish young officers; social climbers from the middling sorts; and ragged lower ranks’.¹⁴ Moreover, this reputation was not only consistent throughout the period, but proved remarkably resilient – a work about the exploits of the ‘Glesca Mileeshy’ published in 1916 repeated almost every Victorian trope about the force.¹⁵ This strongly suggests that it was the army’s new role as promoter of Christian civilisation in the colonies which drove improvement, rather than shifting approaches to the military *per se*. The army burnished its reputation via active service throughout the period, while the militia’s meagre Boer War laurels were not enough to outweigh forty years of peacetime mockery.

¹² B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p.12; ‘Further thoughts on imperial absent-mindedness,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* vol. 36 no. 1 (2008), 106.

¹³ For the earlier status of the military, K. Lynch and M. McCormack, ‘Defining soldiers: Britain’s military, c.1740–1815,’ *War in History* vol. 20 no. 2 (April 2013), 149-50. However, Victorian Britain’s relationship with the regulars could be similarly ambivalent: E. M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester, 1999) p. 202; Bowman and Connolly pp.147-8.

¹⁴ M. McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* (Oxford, 2015) p.59. However, the creation of the Volunteers drew off at least some of the ‘middling sorts’.

¹⁵ Captain R.W. Campbell, *Private Spud Tamson* (1916).

I

The militia officer had been a standard trope in Georgian literature, and regained his place in the public consciousness with the revival of the force.¹⁶ There was, however, a distinctly different portrayal of senior and junior officers. Senior officers most frequently represented the respectable face of the militia, an aristocratic county elite drawn to the service from a combination of paternalism, tradition and duty.¹⁷ In reality, though some like the Duke of Bedford continued to fulfil this stereotype, senior officers frequently lived well out of the county with which their regiment was associated.¹⁸

Despite this, literary examples of respectable county aristocrats as senior officers abound. The 'liberal country gentleman' Ernest Percival was 'the best rider across country, the best racket player in the Anchester court, the handsomest man in our county militia... and indisputably the most popular host

¹⁶ D.F. Bittner, 'Jane Austen and her officers: A portrayal of the army in English literature,' *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 72 no. 290 (Summer 1994), 77, 79

¹⁷ As was hoped when the force was originally reconstructed: see the comments of Spencer Walpole, House of Commons Debates vol. 121, c.820, 20 May 1852; Colonel Charles Sibthorp, vol. 121, c.301, 6 May 1852; Lord John Russell, vol. 119, c.555, 16 Feb. 1852. For an estimate of success, N. Perry, 'The Irish landed class and the British army, 1850–1950,' *War in History*, vol. 18 no. 3 (July 2011), 311–2.

¹⁸ *Report of the committee appointed by the Secretary of State for War to enquire into certain questions that have arisen with respect to the militia and the present brigade dépôt system* (Parl. Papers 1877 [C. 1654], xviii), paragraphs 7087–90.

in the neighbourhood', though even his sister felt obliged to add 'I cannot say that he is of much use as a magistrate'.¹⁹ As well as a JP and deputy-lieutenant, Captain Atherton was 'a very popular man in the county society, with 'safe and moderate' politics: 'He made no one envious by his superior ability, nor did he inspire distrust either as an innovator or as a propounder of new or startling theories.'²⁰ In the latter part of the period, senior militia officers began to exemplify the decline of the county aristocracy. While one eighteen nineties work described the role of the 'leading men in the county' as 'to entertain and be entertained, to preside at local meetings, to lend his name and support to all local undertakings, to go into Parliament, to take the hounds, and a commission in the yeomanry or at least in the militia', a second presented its hero Lord Carranmore as dismayed to learn that a militia colonel was actually an Irish war correspondent and newspaper writer, with his interlocutor commenting 'we have outgrown the traditions of the year one'.²¹ Though Major Tartan of the

¹⁹ C.H. Aïdé, *Rita; an autobiography* (2 vols, 1858) vol.2 p.287. See also the depiction of 'the yeomanry officer, who is also a deputy-lieutenant, and a colonel of militia... He does not look like a warrior; but his position in the country requires that he should identify himself with its institutions': *Fun*, 30 March 1867.

²⁰ J.B.L. Warren (3rd Baron de Tabley), *Salvia Richmond, a novel* (3 vols, 1878) vol.2 p.254; see also vol.3 pp.41, 136 for Captain Charles Mayne.

²¹ Mrs. Conney, *Peggy's Perversity* (3 vols, 1891) vol.1 p.122; E.A. Gowing, *An Unruly Spirit, a Novel* (3 vols, 1890) vol.2 p.176.

Glesca Mileeshy ‘was chief of a clan possessing numerous castles and miles of heather... everything was mortgaged, even his kilt’.²²

Understandably in the light of their limited military role, the portrayal of senior officers focused almost entirely on their social importance. One of the few exceptions was Lord Harrogate: invited to take part in manoeuvres at Aldershot, his regiment’s ‘state of unusually stringent discipline’ and Lord Harrogate’s coolness and firmness enabled them to repel a surprise attack on a bridge.²³ However, it was also made clear that ‘he was thought to have contributed more than most militia officers find it convenient to do’, and he eagerly anticipated a Mediterranean yacht-cruise when the exercises were over.²⁴ Satirical works were much more sceptical about the abilities of senior officers, portraying them as elderly but still lacking in even the most basic military knowledge. Colonel Charles of the Royal East Mudborough Militia commented ‘My usual word of command, Sir, is “Umps! Umps! Umps!” The Adjutant invariably gives it the necessary interpretation.’²⁵

²² Campbell, *Spud Tamson* pp.116-7.

²³ J.B. Harwood, *Helena Lady Harrogate, A Tale*, (3 vols, 1878) vol.2 pp.274-5. Militia regiments took part in the British army’s brief post-Franco-Prussian War vogue for Aldershot manoeuvres: for assessments of their performance, see *Reports on the military manoeuvres held in September 1871* (Parl. Papers 1872 [Cmd. 494], xxxvii), p.10; ‘A Recluse,’ *A Retrospect of the Autumn Manoeuvres* (1872) pp.18-19.

²⁴ Harwood vol.2 pp.223-4.

²⁵ *Punch*, 4 Nov. 1876; for further examples of the colonels relying on their adjutants – regular officers, on temporary assignment to the regiments – see 30 Sep. 1876, 7 Oct. 1876.

Whether fictional or satirical, the brunt of criticism was aimed at the junior officers of the force. Aspiring officers could bypass Sandhurst via a temporary militia commission, a factor not only detrimental to the professional education of the army, but one which deprived the militia of institutional continuity and forced it to rely upon retiring regulars to fill the higher ranks of the force.²⁶ The availability of this back door into the army meant that, whether in literary works or the reports of Royal Commissions, militia subalterns were frequently portrayed as interested in little more than gaming their way into the regulars.²⁷ Though *Punch* argued that the abolition of purchase made the only way into the army ‘genuine hard work’, it admitted that serving in the militia provided a back door, and later described how ‘Edward Scattercash the Idle, assisted by his father’s gold-bags... crept to the Line from the Militia with the help of a cram’.²⁸

These militia officers generally came from unprepossessing intellectual material. The heroes of *For Fortune and Glory: A Story of the Soudan War* plotted to enter the army via numerous vacancies in the Blankshire Regiment’s militia battalion, expressing disquiet that ‘awfully clever and hard reading

²⁶ G. Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society* (1977) pp.153-4.

²⁷ *Militia and Brigade Depot committee*, paragraphs 3611, 4587, 4700-3, 7059-60, 7866.

²⁸ *Punch*, 25 Aug. 1877, 24 March 1883.

fellows get beaten in it [the examination] every time'.²⁹ Lord Carranmore admitted 'I was never a bookworm,' with the authorial coda that he was of 'a race that for many generations had held it derogatory to use their brains'.³⁰ However, it is debateable whether the depictions of these heroes represent a particular disdain for the mental capacity of militia officers, or a general sense of English anti-intellectualism. All the characters prove their worth in combat, and though Lord Carranmore relies on nepotism to secure a post in the Zulu War he is described as enjoying a quasi-intellectual flowering on topics of 'topography and surveying, tactics, fortification, and military law, and even the intricacies of the drill book'.³¹

Junior officers who remained in the militia, however, were portrayed no more favourably: less often noble scions of the aristocracy than wastrels, drunkards and lotharios. The weak-chinned Lord Strathallen, living in London but serving in a kilted Scottish militia regiment, joined 'the masher set, haunted stage-doors, and gave little suppers at the Cafe Royal... high society he had eschewed, except at Hurlingham, on the racecourse, or at Lords,' which led to scandal and social ostracism.³² Lionel Larkins, who prided himself on how

²⁹ L. Hough, *For Fortune and Glory: A Story of the Soudan War* (1885) p.35-6.

³⁰ Gowing, vol.2 p.174. See also R. Thynne, *The Turn of the Tide, an Irish Story of the Day* (1896) p.100, where a character 'could get an exchange into the Line, after a couple of months' coaching, or so'.

³¹ Gowing, vol.2 pp.89, 93.

³² G.W.R. Hamilton, *Betwixt Two Lovers, a Novel* (2 vols, 1891) vol.2 pp.24, 129.

‘remarkably well I looked in my regimentals, at least so the ladies said,’ attempted to sabotage a friend’s matrimonial proposals and steal his bride (along with her inheritance).³³ ‘A little, red-headed, freckle-faced youth’ was revealed to be a lieutenant in the Midland militia, who ‘has seen some hard service at the Castle and County Balls, and has bivouacked by night under a tree in the Front Quad, when he was so wounded in action that he could not find his rooms’.³⁴

Many of those who joined were accused of being motivated by social climbing or a desire for prestige. One colonel solicited a new recruit with the words ‘Gives you a handle to your name, sir; gives a young man the chance of showing himself off at Royal levees, sir’.³⁵ Lieutenant Curleywig’s response to the proposal to integrate the militia more closely with the regulars was: ‘Gold lace instead of silver! Yes! Much prettier at a fancy ball!’³⁶ Conversely, the presence of such social climbers and the poor reputation which the force developed made life difficult for those with more self-respect: *Punch* complained about the indignity of being spotted ‘in Town... in full War Paint’.³⁷

³³ J.M. Morton, ‘The Little Savage’ (first performed 1858), *Victorian Plays Project* (<http://victorian.nuigalway.ie/modx/index.php?id=54&play=212>, accessed 14 April 2016).

³⁴ H.A. Hinkson, *Golden Lads and Girls, a Novel* (1895) p. 117.

³⁵ E.D. Fenton, ‘B,’ *an autobiography* (3 vols, 1874) vol.3 p. 323.

³⁶ *Punch*, 19 March 1881; see also the exploits of Pipkin (17 Dec. 1870), and the Duke of Connaught’s levee (*Fun*, 7 Apr. 1896).

³⁷ *Punch*, 15 Aug. 1874.

Just as the young officer in a fashionable regular regiment was susceptible to the lure of over-spending, militia officers could incur large amounts of debt in their annual month of training.³⁸ The concern expressed by Major Garnham of the 6th West York Militia over ‘regrettable extravagance in some militia messes,’ which he considered ‘unsoldierlike,’ was reflected in contemporary fiction.³⁹ One nineteen-year old captain ran up a nine thousand pound debt; when a lieutenant in the Woldshire militia, studying for the army at the Curragh, announced to a friend that ‘business of a really urgent character’ required the presence in London of ‘somebody on whom I can rely’, the friend assumed that ‘one of the children of Israel has got hold of him’.⁴⁰ With ‘only a hundred a year,’ Giddy Greens ‘was always dodging the Jews... he changed his tailor monthly and always burnt their bills’.⁴¹ However, it should be noted that young characters struggling with debt was by no means a phenomenon exclusive to the militia: the Yeomanry, Britain’s auxiliary cavalry force, also shared the reputation as a pastime too rich for many of those who served.⁴² More importantly, the prevalence of civilian examples of the trope suggests it perhaps

³⁸ For the spendthrift nature of army officers, see Spiers, *Late Victorian Army* pp. 103-6; D. French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People c.1870-2000* (Oxford, 2000) pp.125-6.

³⁹ *Militia and Brigade Depot committee*, paragraphs 7297-7301.

⁴⁰ A.M. Brookfield, *The Bachelor* (3 vols, 1879) vol.3 p.39; B. Webber, *Pigskin and Willow, with other sporting stories* (3 vols, 1879) vol.3 pp.84, 86, 89-90.

⁴¹ Campbell, *Spud Tamson* pp.123.

⁴² George Murray Hay, ‘The British Yeomanry Cavalry, 1794-1920’ (unpub. PhD thesis, University of Kent, 2011), p.72

reflect a more general malaise about the morals of the younger generation and the propensity of second-generation wealth to squander its inheritance, in which the militia were included by default.⁴³

The phenomenon of improbity among junior militia officers was perhaps taken to extremes in *The Sack of Monte Carlo* in which a party of English gentlemen, joined by a token Californian, pull off a smash-and-grab raid on the resort's casinos. The leader, Vincent Blacker, a lieutenant in the East –shire Militia, is motivated by general disdain for 'that highly notorious *cloaca maxima* for all the scum of Europe... to raid the place seemed to me just as reasonable and fair as to go there with a system... [and] a good deal more profitable,' though he also intends to buy back his father-in-law's estates from the 'abandoned-looking old villain' of a lawyer and money-lender who has foreclosed on them.⁴⁴ On the other hand, his fellow militia officers have somewhat earthier motives: Teddy Parsons is 'rather in a hole about a bill of his that's coming due [and] mortally afraid of his father', while Harold Forsyth of the Devon Borderers is attempting to escape a writ for breach of promise.⁴⁵ It should be noted, however, that the raid passes off more or less successfully, with occasional tributes paid to the militia as an institution. Blacker attempts to calm

⁴³ Trollope, for instance, included the trope in *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* (Adolphus, Lord Kilcullen), *Phineas Finn* (Laurence Fitzgibbon) and *The Way We Live Now* (Sir Felix Carbury).

⁴⁴ W. Frith, *The Sack of Monte Carlo, An Adventure of To-day* (1898) pp.2-3, 14-15.

⁴⁵ Frith pp.73-4.

Teddy by reminding him he is ‘as nearly as possible a British officer,’ and attributes his own boldness ‘in some measure to my militia training’, while Brentin, the Californian, vouches for Blacker as ‘a gentleman of position... an officer in Queen Victoria’s militia’.⁴⁶

The general disquiet about the state of the Irish aristocracy was reflected in portrayals of its militia officers. The members of the ‘Rowdeigh’ club, nicknamed ‘The Welsher’s Home’, included ‘Irish militia men — all captains, and predominating to an offensive extent.’⁴⁷ Indeed, Lord Carranmore was advised to transfer to an English militia regiment to improve his chances at a commission, rather than stay in the Tallyho Militia in which he had done ‘some desultory drill’.⁴⁸

This scepticism about the quality of the Irish militia perhaps stemmed from the sectarian and nationalist tension which led the authorities to suspend recruitment and training between 1866 and 1870 and training alone in 1881-2.⁴⁹ The adjutant of the Cork militia called his role ‘the most absolute sinecure probably which the nineteenth century can boast; the regiment has never been

⁴⁶ Frith pp.145, 69, 54.

⁴⁷ D. Dalton, *False Steps, a tale of modern times* (1885) pp.44-5. See also the mention of ‘militia captains at Boulogne, whose view of card-playing wasn’t to the taste of the Queen’s government’: *Funny Folks*, 16 Feb. 1884.

⁴⁸ Gowing, vol.2 pp.175, 45.

⁴⁹ I.F.W. Beckett, ‘Britain,’ in *Citizen Soldiers and the British Empire 1837-1900*, ed. I.F.W. Beckett (Oxford, 2016), pp.49-50.

out since I joined it, and seems little likely to do so either, the way things are going on!’⁵⁰ Lest it be thought these fears were entirely groundless, it should be noted that Louth Rifles soldiers arrived at their depot in Dundalk ‘drunk and singing “God save Ireland”’ in 1887, and “at breakneck pace” on wagonettes and carts... cheering and shouting “Hurrah for John Dillon” and “To h... with Balfour”’ in 1888, while the 3rd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers acted similarly in 1914.⁵¹ Concern for the quality of the rank and file, however, was not limited to Ireland: ordinary militiamen throughout Britain received their share of critique.

II

Unlike the Volunteers, who structured their drill and training around existing work commitments, the militia performed one to two months of continuous recruit training either on enlistment or immediately prior to battalion training, plus a month of battalion training each year. Even in the early years of the force, its officers recognized the effect this had on the quality of recruits by forcing

⁵⁰ Hon. E. Lawless, *Plain Frances Mowbray, and other tales* (1889) p.143.

⁵¹ B. and D. Hall, *The Louth Rifles 1877-1908* (Dun Laoghaire, 2000) p.18; Bowman and Connelly, p.110.

them to select primarily from casual labourers.⁵² The poor quality of the men was often highlighted: *Punch* featured a pen portrait of a street sweeper ‘in an old militia coat,’ and included in its ‘list of cures for street tramps’ the suggestion ‘offer to get him into the Militia’.⁵³ ‘Mike Mitchell the Malliky’ enlisted because ‘it’s easier than work’, along with similarly-minded individuals from ‘the Millbank Malingerers’ and ‘the Coldbath Fields Contingent’.⁵⁴ The claim that an East End militia regiment consisted predominantly of pick-pockets was a source of amusement, with *Fun* suggesting the regiment was ‘admirably adapted for pick-et duty’ and *Boys of England* claiming it trained in open order to prevent the rear rank from pick-pocketing the front rank.⁵⁵ The Donegal militia’s employment included ‘philosophising at street corners, pedestrianizing for – for – health, I suppose, and profit; collecting *bric-a-brac* and antiques in exchange for pins and needles; [and] bird-fancying – a pleasant and gentle vocation... usually followed by the silvery light of the horned moon’.⁵⁶ Most of the Glesca Mileeshy ‘arrived shirtless and almost bootless... [they] had

⁵² For an early example of this concern, see the comments of Colonel Alcock, 1st Middlesex Militia, in Major Arthur Leahy R.E., ‘Army organisation: our infantry forces and infantry reserves,’ *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* (hereafter *JRUSI*) vol. 12 no. 50 (1868) 338-9.

⁵³ *Punch*, 26 Jan. 1856, 7 Nov. 1874.

⁵⁴ *Fun*, 6 Nov. 1896; Coldbath Fields and Millbank were notorious London prisons.

⁵⁵ *Fun*, 24 Oct. 1868; *Boys of England*, 3 Dec. 1880.

⁵⁶ ‘Mac’ (Seumas MacManus), *The Leadin’ Road to Donegal and other Stories* (1895) pp.20-1.

no permanent place of abode,' while the 'Duke's Canaries' plundered 'not only the shopkeepers, but the farmers for miles round'.⁵⁷

Though these militia recruits were by no means inferior to the men joining the regular army, in the regulars the identity of a soldier quickly overrode and subsumed previous social status. As amateur soldiers, both the militia and Volunteers were defined far more strongly than the regulars by their civilian identities. The Volunteers, however, came from higher echelons of the working class than their militia counterparts. Neither Volunteer 'class corps' of bankers or painters, nor working-class companies drawn from single employers, managed to find a counterpart in the militia.⁵⁸

Indeed, when *Punch* chose to make a low-status parody of a traditional high-society preoccupation, it often chose militiamen to symbolize this shift. In the report of a 'grand wedding in low life' Corporal Jones of the Tower Hamlets Militia was listed as among the attendants at a wedding in St Giles, along with 'Mr Fagin, Mr William Sikes, jun.,... Jeremiah Didler and Noah Claypole, Esqs. (of the detective police)... and many others of the elite of the Mint and the

⁵⁷ Campbell, *Spud Tamson* p.69; C.M. Campbell, *Deilie Jock* (1897), pp.270-1

⁵⁸ Bowman and Connelly pp.124-7; Beckett, *Riflemen Form* pp.52-70, 73-86; P.M. Morris, 'Leeds and the amateur military tradition: the Leeds Rifles and their antecedents, c. 1859-1918' (unpub. PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1983), vol. 1 pp.10-37.

purlieus of Drury Lane'.⁵⁹ Paradoxically, a working-class youth who joined the militia for the month of guaranteed work it provided each year could find himself shut out of other jobs by this decision: one fictional ploughman found it 'materially helped... that he was not – as so many of the Strath lads then were – a militia-man.'⁶⁰ The low social status of the average militiaman, the graphic and repeated portrayals of this low status in literature, and the requirement to take a month away from work for training all combined to make it increasingly difficult for the militia to secure respectable employment.

This was far from the high hopes of the early days of the militia. A story about the first recruits to the militia, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, emphasized the need for the force to be rooted in society; tellingly, the terms it used strongly resembled later descriptions of the Volunteers. A captain expressed pride that the new recruits were 'the sturdy yeomen of whom our country is so justly proud'; one recruit eloquently explained that 'what one would wish to see would be a force composed of the country-gentlemen, and merchants as its officers, and the yeomen, and middle-

⁵⁹ *Punch*, 30 March 1878. See also the announcement of 'the marriage of Mr. James Neverpay, of the Whitechapel Light Horse Militia Infantry, with Miss Coster, of the New Cut' (*Moonshine*, 1 July 1882), the court column announcing that the 'girl' of 'Long Tom Fluke' has 'gone off mysterious with a militia man' (*Punch*, 20 Dec. 1879), and 'Tooraloo' in the *Chevaleeria Costerana* (*Punch*, 28 Dec. 1895)

⁶⁰ M. MacLennan, *Muckle Jock, and other stories of Peasant Life in the North* (1891) pp.119-20. For the successful interaction of work and militia life, J.M. Brock, 'The militia: an aspect of highland temporary migration, 1871-1907,' *Northern Scotland* vol. 17 (1997), 135-51.

classes of the towns, in its ranks'; while the colonel announced 'what we want is householders; whether they be farmers, or cottagers, or shopkeepers, or mechanics; men with settled homes, and, consequently, with a stake in the country.'⁶¹ Though the regiment also recruited from the emigrant Irish population of the manufacturing town of Kitley, the work made it clear that this was less than ideal not just because they lacked a stake in the country, but because 'intimate mutual acquaintance of [the militia's] members... would so materially increase their confidence in each other, and in themselves'.⁶²

More glaring still was the claim of the adjutant that 'in the militia a gentleman may serve as a non-commissioned officer – ay! Or even as a private... without in the least degrading himself.'⁶³ In fact, the volunteer non-commissioned officers were one of the weakest links in the militia. In most regiments, 'the undue familiarity which, we are told in the proverb, is apt to breed contempt, obtained rather much between the non-commissioned officers and the privates during the three-quarters of the year during which they were gentle and peaceable civilians'.⁶⁴ On the one hand the privates 'did not sink the civilian in the soldier', on the other, the NCO 'did not always preserve that dignity and hauteur towards his subordinates which is usually of necessity

⁶¹ Anon., *The Militia, or Army of Reserve* (1853) pp.6, 79, 126.

⁶² Anon., *Army of Reserve* pp.45-6.

⁶³ Anon., *Army of Reserve* p.78.

⁶⁴ MacManus pp.20-1.

affected by men of rank'.⁶⁵ The number of candidates for non-commissioned rank was already reduced by desertion and transfer into the regulars, and was reduced still further by the likelihood of violent retribution if they performed their disciplinary duties. In his evidence before a militia commission, Lieutenant-Colonel Aikman, V.C., of the Royal East Middlesex Militia spoke 'of a man's head being broken... by a mallet being thrown at it in the dark, for putting a man into the orderly room.'⁶⁶ Though the militia officers who testified to this violence did their best to suggest methods of mitigating its effects, they also seemed to acknowledge that this kind of casual violence was fundamental to the elements of the working class from which the militia recruited.

The inability of the force to recruit from the respectable working classes, as had been hoped when it was recreated, was blamed on numerous factors. The role of the military in suppressing popular disturbances in the early nineteenth century may have played a part, but the decrease in military support to the civil power in England and Scotland over the course of the century did not commensurately improve militia recruitment.⁶⁷ The opposition of the friendly societies undoubtedly affected sentiment towards the force, though the Society

⁶⁵ MacManus p.21.

⁶⁶ *Militia and Brigade Depot committee*, paragraph 2374; see also paragraphs 1997, 3407, 5412, 5961, 7122-3, 7652, 7834-9, 8297, 8514, 9202 and 9868.

⁶⁷ E.A. Cameron, 'Internal Policing and Public order, c.1797-1900,' in *A Military History of Scotland* eds. E.M. Spiers, J.A. Crang, M. Strickland (Edinburgh, 2012) pp.440-1, 444; Beckett, *Amateur Military Tradition* pp.192-3

for Promoting Christian Knowledge also blamed ‘those mischievous fellows, the peace agitators’.⁶⁸ Less readily acknowledged, either at the time or since, was the poor image of the militia given through ballads, one of the most popularly accessible forms of literature circulating in the period, which accused the force of being archaic, useless, and immoral.

The large number of militia regiments embodied during the Crimean War made the force an opportunity to escape justice or responsibility, particularly fatherhood: one ballad described a recruit stealing his father’s coat to volunteer, while ‘charming Jane’ gave birth to ‘a little son, marked with a gun/A bayonet, cap and feather.’⁶⁹ However, the militia’s peacetime training was equally disliked, with one Durham ballad describing it as:

You think to have a lazy month, and get your swig of beer
 You will fight your battle o’er a pipe, and ne’er receive a scar...
 When the trumpet sounds for glory, you’ll be gladly rushing in
 Into some snug old alehouse, to spend your hard earn’d tin
 And when your tin it is all gone, you’ll coax the girls to treat
 By whispering marriage in their ears, and giving kisses sweet.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Beckett, *Amateur Military Tradition* p.149; Anon., *Army of Reserve* pp.6, 38-44.

⁶⁹ ‘The British militia-man’ (Roud V9268), *British militia men* (London, [1846-54]) [Bodleian Library, Johnson 477]; *The British Militia-man* (Edinburgh, [18--]) [Bodleian Library, Firth c.14 (328)].

⁷⁰ ‘Durham Militia’ (Roud V12680), *Durham Militia* (Durham, 1854) [Bodleian Library, Firth c.14(327); Harding B 11(1027); Johnson Ballads 1558]. See also T.J. Williams, ‘Nursesey Chickweed’ (first performed

Another ballad portrayed a militiaman describing how during an exercise ‘we lost sight of the enemy altogether, but presently we found them, ‘twas in a Public House... I beat them all at drinking’.⁷¹ *Fun* remarked that ‘though only rated as occasional troops, every “malliky” of our acquaintance is a “regular” booser [sic].’⁷² These images drew on traditional views of the military as an agent of moral degradation: in more extended literary works, membership of the militia was often an integral part of a character’s disgrace. Willy Kirkintulloch the golf professional counted service in the militia as a black mark equal to fourteen days in jail, while the protagonist of *Deilie Jock* was ashamed of his membership of ‘the Duke’s Canaries,’ a regiment of ‘cairters, scavengers, tinkers, loafers, thieves, and broken tradesmen,’ despite himself being a poacher, tramp and deserter.⁷³ The low, if not negative, value placed on militia service in the popular mind was a significant contribution to the militia’s difficulties in recruiting.

1859), *Victorian Plays Project* (<http://victorian.nuigalway.ie/modx/index.php?id=54&play=309>, accessed 14 April 2016), where Mrs Chickweed ‘cut away with a corporal in the militia’.

⁷¹ ‘The bold militia man’ (Roud V284), *The Bold Militia Man* ([s.l.], [n.d.]) [Bodleian Library, Firth c.14(324)].

⁷² *Fun*, 22 Aug. 1877.

⁷³ R. Marshall, *The Haunted Major* (1902) p.59; Campbell, *Deilie Jock* pp.36-9 for his poaching, p.104 for his militia training, p.227 for his desertion from the Coldstream Guards, p.268 for his tramping, p.270 for his second training.

As had been done with earlier auxiliary forces, ballads mocked the military pretensions of the militia. One ballad called them the ‘ragged arse Militia’ and portrayed them as slovenly:

Sound the trumpet, beat the drum
Shoulder the musket, fire the gun
Up your trousers gently hitch
Guard the Queen, and the Tower ditch
Stand in an upright position then
You Tower Hamlets Militia men.⁷⁴

This theme was picked up elsewhere, with a ballad describing a militiaman as wearing ‘a coat ‘twould fit Ben Caunt and trousers made for Bendigo’.⁷⁵ Another described the militia marching ‘with musket wrong side first, and your bayonet lord knows where’, while a third explained how the men would be drilled by ‘an old pensioner... with a squint in both his eyes... hold your head up neatly, or he will punch you in the nose.’⁷⁶

⁷⁴ ‘The bold militiamen’ (Roud V21129), *The bold militiamen* (London, [1846-54]) [Bodleian Library, Johnson 473].

⁷⁵ ‘The British militia-man’ (Roud V9268) [Bodleian Library, Johnson 477]; *The British Militia-man* (Edinburgh, [18--]) [Bodleian Library, Firth c.14 (328)]. Both men were prize-fighters, but William ‘Bendigo’ Thompson was three stones lighter and six inches shorter than ‘Big Ben’ Caunt.

⁷⁶ ‘Durham Militia’ (Roud V12680) [Bodleian Library, Firth c.14(327); Harding B 11(1027); Johnson Ballads 1558]; ‘New militia!’ (Roud V3296), *New militia!* ([s.l.], [n.d.]) [Bodleian Library, Firth c.14 (325); Harding B11 (2658)]; the ballad also describes the militia staff in less than complementary terms.

The ballads also criticised the lack of support given to the men, portraying it as a swift route to the poorhouse. The Tower Hamlets militia 'look'd as if they wanted grub... the people one and all do say/It's a shabby trick to dock their pay'.⁷⁷ Elsewhere, hope was expressed that 'if you get shot... Perhaps you'll get a pension,' while the 'lads of Lancashire' were warned that 'they must stand for to be shot at for a shilling in the day'.⁷⁸ In various versions, this latter ballad explored the different ways in which volunteers for the militia would be cheated: the bounty, paid not in a lump sum but 'two shillings every month', would 'keep you in tobacco, lads, or else in treacle beer/ if you make application to the parish overseer'; 'if you serve both true and faithfully, you'll well rewarded be/ with a ticket for the poor-house, to be fed on skillygalee'; 'if you should survive the war- with a stump or wooden leg/ you will get a ticket for the poor-house, or otherwise go and beg'.⁷⁹ With such negative propaganda being disseminated, the job of the recruiting sergeants in attracting sufficient recruits to reach the force's establishment – let alone to allow it to pick and choose the best men – was rendered almost impossible.

⁷⁷ 'The bold militiamen' (Roud V21129) [Bodleian Library, Johnson 473].

⁷⁸ 'The British militia-man' (Roud V9268) [Bodleian Library, Johnson 477], [Bodleian Library, Firth c.14 (328)]; 'New militia!' (Roud V3296); *Shoulder up or The new militia* (Preston, [1840-1866]) [Bodleian Library, 2806 c.16(27), Harding B11(3509)].

⁷⁹ 'The British militia-man' (Roud V9268), [Bodleian Library, Johnson 477]; 'New militia!' (Roud V3296) [Bodleian Library, 2806 c.16(27), Harding B 11(3509)]; 'New militia!' (Roud V3296) [Bodleian Library, Firth c.14 (325); Harding B11 (2658)].

Indeed, one of the few positive portrayals of a militia unit focused not on the regiment's role as a defender of the British state, but as the emblem of fledgling Irish nationalism. The ballad claimed that 'if poor old Ireland had her rights, her sons would be as brave/ as any other nation' and claimed that the Limerick militia had demonstrated this in their clashes with the representatives of the British state:

When they were in Buttevant, they proved themselves like men...

Those English dogs with terror from them did run away

Their cry was no surrender, we're from the Shamrock shire

While their band played up Patrick's day, and Paddy's evermore.⁸⁰

The implication that the militia were readier to fight their fellow soldiers than the enemy was present in other works: the Colonel of the Donegal Militia 'nervously endeavour[ed] to stave off... a sham battle between two sections of his men, the probable result of which he could only anticipate with fear and trembling'.⁸¹ The colonel was no less nervous than 'those who awaited the attack, with growing trepidation and indecision... Very evidently the oncoming party, being in a bad humour, were resolved to make someone pay the piper', and when the fight ensued it was described as 'one of the fiercest encounters

⁸⁰ 'A new song in praise of the Limerick militia' (Roud V12688), *A new song in praise of the Limerick militia* (Cork, [18--]) [Bodleian Library, 2806 c.8(3), Harding B26 (537)].

⁸¹ MacManus p.28.

witnessed on a European battlefield since memorable Waterloo'.⁸² 'Felix O'Funnigan' described the Cork Militia's 'kind of fun between pitch-and-toss and manslaughter... You would not find such a collection of black, blue, yellow, and purple eyes in the country as we used to have on parade,' and *Judy* expressed surprise that only two were seriously wounded in a faction fight in the Kerry Militia.⁸³

This frequent recourse to violence was not limited to Ireland. In a paragraph of mock war news, *Punch* coupled the Royal North-West-South Diddlesex Militia's embodiment with the doubling of the police force at their depot, while Mrs Brown believed "eathen savages and pagin Turks' were 'infants in harms compared with... them milisher'.⁸⁴ The joint training between the Glesca and Perth Mileeshy, meanwhile, led to a mass brawl.⁸⁵ The chaos that usually resulted from militia training or embodiment were circumstances with which the Victorian newspaper-reading public were entirely familiar, with most militia regiments acting as a force of disruption rather than order within their local communities.⁸⁶ It is difficult to prove whether those who spread a negative

⁸² MacManus pp.30, 37.

⁸³ *Owl*, 7 July 1882; *Judy*, 17 July 1872.

⁸⁴ *Punch*, 29 July 1882; *Fun*, 17 Aug. 1868, 24 Aug. 1868

⁸⁵ Campbell, *Spud Tamson* p.74

⁸⁶ For example, the 1st West York Rifles threatened to burn down Pontefract lock-up (*Hull Packet*, 10 Aug. 1855) and fought the police on two separate occasions to prevent the arrest of alleged rapists (*York Herald*, 2 June 1860). Mass riots declined over time, but low-scale disturbances continued – such as three men of the regiment assaulting a constable (*Pontefract Telegraph*, 5 July 1879) or two privates

image of the militia had been personally affected by the disruption rather than repeating the complaints of others, though *Judy* informed its readers that ‘when we resided in peaceful Hampshire some time back, a regiment of militia used to invade that pleasant locality once a year’.⁸⁷ Although the militia’s ability to fight the authorities was uncontested, its ability to defend Britain from foreign enemies was unproven.

III

Though the revived militia was never tested in battle, newspapers, journals and books expressed a wide range of opinions about its likely performance from the 1850s onwards. Under particular scrutiny was the length and quality of training, and whether this made the force an effective means of defending the country.

Punch provided a diary of a sub-lieutenant of militia which featured men ‘sleepily learning the rudiments of squad drill’, called musketry training learning ‘to fire at nothing in particular’, and detailed how ‘the regiment took violently to skirmishing, and attempted to get up in three days what Regulars would

assaulting a constable while between 20 and 40 of their fellows impeded the police (*Pontefract Telegraph*, 10 July 1880).

⁸⁷ *Judy*, 9 March 1887, 28 March 1888.

certainly have consumed six months in learning'.⁸⁸ A later diary made much the same complaints, criticising the way that the battalion 'rushed in four days through a musketry course requiring six weeks, and learned the whole duty of a soldier in rather less than fifteen hours'.⁸⁹

As a result, estimates of the force's value were extremely low. An mock article 'prepared by a practiced statistician' calculated the militia's total worth as fourteen per cent 'local lawn tennis club', twelve per cent 'amateur acting company', sixty-one per cent 'peace association', and one per cent 'fighting power' – less than its two per cent value as a temperance organisation.⁹⁰ *Punch* concluded that the improbability of the militia meeting the German Landwehr in combat was 'very lucky for – the weaker militia', while *Fun* reported that the German observer at the 1872 army manoeuvres considered the militia 'ridiculous' and the French observer 'wouldn't mind leading the Mobiles of the Loire against the Kilkenny militia'.⁹¹ Indeed, the fact that the auxiliary forces – both militia and volunteers – were a broken reed was so obvious that children could recognize it: Willie Knowles doubting the martial spirit of both and

⁸⁸ *Punch*, 26 May 1877; see also Colonel Enfield's discussion of the mobilisation experiment on 5 Aug. 1876.

⁸⁹ *Punch*, 22 March 1879.

⁹⁰ *Punch*, 11 Oct. 1884.

⁹¹ *Punch*, 16 Dec. 1876; *Fun*, 5 Oct. 1872. The *Garde Mobile* of the Army of the Loire, a hastily-raised force lacking equipment and training, was defeated by the professional Prussians at Orleans and Le Mans.

Johnnie Harris believing ‘half of them would never join... [if] there was the faintest scent of war in the air, and the other half would run away rather than stand to be fired at.’⁹²

These written delineations of the militia’s failings were reinforced by cartoons and other forms of visual representation.⁹³ One of the first images of the militia was two yokels unable to remain in step, and a positive depiction of the militia flocking to volunteer in defence of their country when the Crimean War broke out was swiftly followed by a militiaman in a pothouse boasting of mowing down Russians for a shilling an acre, and a puny militiaman on guard as his belle lamented that ‘Guards and fusileers is [sic] so scarce’.⁹⁴ Subsequent images showed militia guards soliciting tips from regular officers, militia officers ignoring drill in favour of watching young ladies, and, when militia regiments were embodied in 1885, a recently-retired militia officer wracked with guilt at having abandoned the force in its hour of need.⁹⁵

Just as the few positive depictions of the force in its early years stemmed from patriotic enthusiasm in the light of the Crimean War, so too were those in its later years inspired by Boer War jingoism. During the war *Punch* announced

⁹² S. Harleigh, *Chums: A Tale for the Youngsters* (1878) p.136. *Boys of England*, 17 Oct. 1874 also included a story in which the militia joined a rebellion and massacred a volunteer regiment formed from the gentlemen of the locality.

⁹³ For earlier pictorial depictions of the militia, see McCormack pp.59-71.

⁹⁴ *Punch*, 11 June 1853, 27 May 1854, 15 July 1854, 17 March 1855.

⁹⁵ *Punch*, 22 June 1872, 23 Apr. 1880, 25 Apr. 1885.

its belief that the militia had 'been habitually held up to ridicule... for many years', but that it had been 'useful to the Nation... particularly in times of national danger' and that the best method of reinforcing its value in the eyes of the public was 'the pages of *Punch*.'⁹⁶ In announcing this *Punch* was perhaps relying on the short memories of its readers: though it made occasional complaints that the militia were unfairly treated by the public or by government, even during the Boer War itself the view presented of the force was mixed at best.⁹⁷ Though one cartoon pictured Mr Punch bidding farewell to the regulars going to the Transvaal with the words 'our militia boy will look after us while you're away', a second depicted two bearded navvies outside a pub examining a scrawny militiaman with the words 'Be a bad job if ole Kruger 'appened to ketch sight of 'im!'⁹⁸ Furthermore, when *Punch* made its announcement it neglected to mention that it had committed some of the acts which it now criticized. For instance, it complained that 'officers have been twitted for retaining their rank outside the training', but it had previously announced that for the year outside training the militia officer 'besides wearing my uniform at a levee or fancy all, [did] practically nothing' and discussed the 'social advantages attaching to the commission of a Militia man' including 'membership to the Senior Service

⁹⁶ *Punch*, 20 Dec. 1899.

⁹⁷ See, for instance, the encouragement of militia education in *Punch*, 5 March 1853; complaints about the quality of militia kit, 16 Oct. 1858; criticism of the decision to reduce the length of training, 15 March 1879; highlighting the under-manning in subaltern ranks, 21 May 1898.

⁹⁸ *Punch*, 25 Oct. 1899, 16 Aug. 1899.

Clubs' and the use of rank on cards.⁹⁹ Jokes about the militia after the Boer war strongly resembled those that came before: ubiquitous criminality, poorly educated Irish militiamen, manoeuvres at risk of becoming brawls, a bugler accidentally blocking his instrument with a quid of tobacco, and a militiaman breaching military convention by saluting fellow privates because 'anyfink does to practice on, don't it?'¹⁰⁰

The wave of invasion literature and fiction speculating on the likely course of a future conflict generally paid little attention to the potential role of the militia. Those that did were frequently less than complementary. In *The Great War of 189-*, 'the general embodiment of the militia has shown serious defects in our system... there are not a few Irish militiamen who have been in the habit of belonging to as many as five different corps at one time'.¹⁰¹ In *The Last Great Naval War*, the lack of trained staff among the auxiliary forces and 'indifferent peace training' risked 'the wildest confusion'.¹⁰² In fact, such a low estimate was placed on the worth of the militia that *Punch* mockingly satirized the more jingoistic invasion literature by praising their value: an invading enemy finds its invasion 'confronted by the very flower of the British army' in

⁹⁹ *Punch*, 20 Dec. 1899, 20 Aug. 1898, 10 April 1897.

¹⁰⁰ *Punch*, 19 Feb. 1902; *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 21 March 1908, 15 May 1909, 25 Sep. 1909

¹⁰¹ Rear-Admiral P. Colomb, Colonel J.F. Maurice, Captain F.N. Maude, A. Forbes, C. Lowe, D.C. Murray, F. Scudamore, *The Great War of 189- (1895)* pp.151-3; see also *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 28 Oct. 1911

¹⁰² A.N. Seaforth, *The Last Great Naval War, An Historical Retrospect* (1891) pp.26, 112.

the form of ‘two magnificent regiments of Militia – the 7th Rifle Brigade and the 4th Cheshire regiment... In ten minutes the hostile host were crumpled up like a sheet of paper’.¹⁰³

The Battle of Dorking, which started the trend, doled out blame for the tragedy that befell Britain fairly evenly. Though the militia were more susceptible to drink than the Volunteers, they were marginally better equipped and stronger in number, and neither force successfully compensated for lack of organisation with enthusiasm.¹⁰⁴ However, subsequent works tended to elevate the Volunteers over the militia, perhaps reflecting a perception that the former were increasing in usefulness while the latter stagnated.¹⁰⁵ *The Great War of 189–*, which included contributions from serving officers, commented that ‘whereas with the militia, unfortunately, the contrast between the peace effective and those who now show on parade is melancholy, with the volunteers it is almost startling’: the Volunteers, rather than the militia, reflected the fact that ‘the nation is roused’.¹⁰⁶

William Le Queux, perhaps the foremost exponent of the invasion literature genre, perfectly exemplifies this phenomenon. In *The Great War in*

¹⁰³ *Punch*, 1 Aug. 1891; see also 16 June 1888 for the ‘Destruction of Marseilles, Versailles, Dieppe, Lyons, and several other important towns, by a regiment of British militia.’

¹⁰⁴ General Sir G.T. Chesney, ‘The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer’, in I.F. Clarke (ed.) *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871-1914* (Liverpool, 1995) pp.40, 43, 44, 52-3.

¹⁰⁵ For the growing role of the volunteer force, Beckett, *Riflemen Form* pp.173-203.

¹⁰⁶ Colomb et al. pp.155-6.

England in 1897, the militia's representation consisted of a dozen named units and a handful of general references to the force.¹⁰⁷ By contrast, his depiction of the Volunteer force was glowing, showing them as providing defenders for provincial cities as well as protecting London.¹⁰⁸ Le Queux dramatically portrayed their heroism, describing how in Sussex 'our civilian soldiers were bearing their part bravely, showing how Britons could fight, and day after day repelling the repeated assaults with a vigour that at once proved their efficiency' and how 'from behind their barricades men of Edinburgh fought valiantly, and everywhere inflicted heavy loss... astute, loyal and fearless, they, after fighting hard, fell back from Edinburgh in order'.¹⁰⁹

Not only did Le Queux give the volunteers the main role in the story, he also devoted large sections of the text to bald lists of battalions and their commanders which, perhaps more to modern readers than to contemporaries, destroy the flow of the piece.¹¹⁰ He was motivated to do so by a number of

¹⁰⁷ W. Le Queux, *The Great War in England in 1897* (1895), pp. 134, 158, 259. 4th Bn. Durham Light Infantry (p.112) and 4th Bn. Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (p.263) are volunteer battalions rather than militia.

¹⁰⁸ Le Queux, pp.117-23 (Newcastle), pp.150-6 (Birmingham), pp.191-225 (Manchester), pp.238- 255 (Edinburgh), pp.259-67 (Glasgow), pp.269-82, 293- 303, 313- 25 (London).

¹⁰⁹ Le Queux, pp.229, 255-6.

¹¹⁰ The list on p.313 alone contains 21 infantry battalions and five artillery regiments, more than twice the number of militia units named in the whole work. See also p.190 (Lancashire units), p.244 (Edinburgh units), p.272 (units at Guildford), pp.293-4 (units north of London), pp.319-21 (units engaged in the final victory). One review praised Le Queux's 'careful elaboration of detail... he has shown considerable ingenuity in arranging the minutiae of the campaign. His regiments and officers... are, like the contents of the florist's catalogue, all true to name.' (*Morning Post*, 16 Oct. 1894)

factors: on the one hand, his reliance on Lieutenant J.G. Stevens of the Seventeenth Middlesex Rifle Volunteers in writing the story; on the other, the expectation that the more literate and affluent Volunteers would pay to read about familiar names, regiments and locations.¹¹¹ The work's overshadowing of the militia reflected their relative decline by the latter part of the period: even Lord Roberts, in his foreword, complained that 'you take but little account of the Militia, which... would seem to be rather out of fashion at present'.¹¹² More importantly, it supported the impression that the militia could not be relied upon for the defence of the country while the volunteers could. When Le Queux came to write a sequel in *The Invasion of 1910*, the French and Russians were replaced by Germans – and the militia had ceased to exist.

IV

These depictions are particularly notable because they were made in a period in which the army's status in the public eye was improving.¹¹³ Though observers

¹¹¹ Le Queux also claimed to have 'spent over four months visiting coast defences and "all the imaginary battlefields",' during which time he may have received assistance or hospitality from provincial Volunteer officers: *Pearson's Magazine*, April 1897, p.460, quoted in Rogert T. Stearn, 'The mysterious Mr Le Queux: war novelist, defence publicist and counter spy,' *Soldiers of the Queen* vol. 70 (Sep. 1992), 26.

¹¹² Le Queux p.4.

¹¹³ Spiers, *Late Victorian Army* pp.180-203.

continued to make criticisms of the army, the development of the role of the regulars as defenders of Christian civilisation in the empire and the proliferation of positive images helped to counterbalance these negative depictions. These positive images of the regular army permeated contemporary British society, from the elite space of the art gallery to the popular space of the music hall: songs sung in public spaces, mass-produced images bought to decorate private homes, and commercial mascots and advertisements which spanned both public and private all contributed towards establishing the army's status as a patriotic, popular institution.¹¹⁴

However, the beneficial effects of this more popular image appears not to have percolated down to the militia. For instance, while the music hall praised regular soldiers in recreations of famous battles or songs about military leaders, it depicted the militia in sketches like 'Off Guard – On Booze.' This parodied the famous song 'On Guard,' about the plight of a Crimea veteran discharged from the army, by telling of the plight of a militiaman's wife trying to reform her alcoholic husband.¹¹⁵ When given the opportunity to sympathize with the plight

¹¹⁴ J.W.M. Hichberger, *Images of the army: the military in British art, 1815-1914* (Manchester, 1988); *Popular imperialism and the military, 1850-1950*, ed. J.M. MacKenzie (Manchester, 1992); M. Paris, *Warrior nation: images of war in British popular culture, 1850-2000* (2000).

¹¹⁵ D. Russell, "'We carved our way to glory": the British soldier in music hall song and sketch,' in MacKenzie p.73. See also Mr Dagnall's song 'When I Was In The Militia' in the comic operetta 'Domestic Economy', 'a good comic song' (*Morning Post*, 8 April 1890) featuring 'appropriate rakishness' (*Judy*, 23 April 1890).

of militia reservists being discharged without clothing or money, *Funny Folks* chose instead to show a regular sentry smirking at a moustached and pipe-smoking militiaman wearing one of his wife's dresses.¹¹⁶ Nor was there much demand for alternative depictions of the militia: one of the few positive portrayals of a militia officer, Lord Harewood, was met with the critical responses that he was 'a trifle dull... rather an ordinary specimen of the conventional British nobleman' and 'somewhat conventional and wooden'.¹¹⁷

In some cases, tropes historically used to criticize the regular army were transferred to or shared with the militia. Whether regular or militia, soldiers were often portrayed as errant Romeos stealing away the affections of women, labelling them as an outsider group akin to the foreigners who played a similar role.¹¹⁸ While this view of the regulars was modified and softened over the course of the century by incorporating praise for their military prowess, the militia enjoyed no such favourable treatment. In fact, when the militia soldier was required to act as a romantic foil for the hero, their military ineffectiveness was often played up as a way of demonstrating their fundamental unsuitability

¹¹⁶ *Funny Folks*, 10 Aug. 1878. For the earlier tenuous nature of military masculinity, Linch and McCormack p.155; T. Fulford, 'Sighing for a soldier: Jane Austen and military pride and prejudice,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature* vol. 57 no. 2 (Sept. 2002), 172-4

¹¹⁷ *Morning Post*, 24 Dec. 1878; *Graphic*, 22 March 1879.

¹¹⁸ Russell, p. 61; see the previous examples in n.59, n.69 and n.70, or Fulford p.164

as a husband.¹¹⁹ The militia officer could also appear as a dandy, as with Rutland Barrington's depiction of Colonel Cadbury, 'a London tailor and Militia officer posturing as a Margate sew-ciety swell'.¹²⁰

It should perhaps be unsurprising that the militia, enlisted as they were for home service, were excluded from the praise given to soldiers based on their acting as agents of imperialism.¹²¹ This phenomenon can best be exemplified by the works of G.A. Henty, perhaps the foremost exponent of children's military fiction. Though Henty's subject matter ranged from the Punic wars, the Crusades, and the French Revolution to coal miners, Luddites and California gold miners, he paid little heed to the militia. Their few mentions ignored their role in supplying personnel to the regulars and were limited to their second-line home-defence role, where they were either coupled with the volunteers or overshadowed by them. Henry's examination of the Boer War, for instance, overlooked the large number of militia battalions sent overseas in favour of

¹¹⁹ See the previous examples of Lord Strathallen and Lionel Larkins; for further inappropriate romances contracted by militia officers, see Harold Forsyth in Frith or Colonel Ross of the Southshire Militia, who illicitly romances an heiress 23 years his junior in F.L. Carson, *Hilda: A Love Story* (1876).

¹²⁰ *Funny Folks*, 6 Apr. 1889; see McCormack pp.60-1 for Georgian 'macaroni' predecessors.

¹²¹ Note that when a prospective MP sought to use his militia service in support of his candidacy, he was followed by 'rough, irreverent lads... jeering at him for "a mileeshy man"': St. John G. Ervine, *The Foolish Lovers* (New York, 1920) p.17.

condemning the War Office's prejudice in rejecting the offers of service made by the London Irish and London Scottish.¹²²

The journals which also targeted Henty's juvenile adventure market similarly overlooked the militia, with sporadic mentions being critical and supportive in equal measure.¹²³ Humphreys, 'a tall, broad-shouldered son of Albion' with a 'handsome, boyish face' who was cramming for his militia exams, was matched by Fred Marriott, 'fond of wearing loud clothes and displaying a quite superfluous amount of flash jewellery'; Tim Doyle joined the francs-tireurs having 'served five years in the Cork Militia, and wore the badge as a marksman,' whereas Corkles had served in the militia until he 'was drummed out' and when handed a rifle 'sniffed at the breach, and then putting the butt of the weapon to his shoulder closed both eyes'.¹²⁴ Rather than spreading imperialism leading to widespread, uncritical and unspecific endorsement of militarist values, it seems that popular attitudes were more nuanced, supporting military institutions only to the extent that they contributed to the upholding of imperial or British values. It is perhaps telling that the most positive depiction

¹²² G.A. Henty, *With Buller in Natal, or, A Born Leader* (1901) p.137; see also G.A. Henty, *Through Three Campaigns: A Story of Chitral, Tirah, and Ashantee* (1904) p.292.

¹²³ The only wholly positive story was written by Colonel Lewis Hough, about a militia officer volunteering with Garibaldi: *Union Jack*, 29 June 1882.

¹²⁴ *Boys of England*, 11 Oct. 1895, 29 Apr. 1898; *Union Jack*, 21 Apr. 1881; *Boys of England*, 27 Aug. 1897. See also the mention of the Louth militia: *Boy's Own Paper*, 31 March 1883.

of the militia, Captain Campbell's *Private Spud Tamson*, appeared only after the mass mobilisation of auxiliary forces in the First World War.

Most of the authors featured in this article fell short of the dubious literary immortality achieved by Henty or the *Boy's Own Paper*. The success they enjoyed ranged from faint praise along the lines of 'a nice complete story with a proper ending' or 'thoroughly readable and amusing, and possesses a fair share of possibility', to mild criticism, with one author being accused of having 'strictly confined himself to the stock incidents of fiction'.¹²⁵ The only outstanding work was outstandingly bad, with comments including 'consistently and systematically ridiculous', 'unmitigated rubbish,' and 'has one redeeming quality- it consists of only two volumes'.¹²⁶ Few of these works dealt with the militia's military value, with most being light romances set among the aristocracy or gentry. This under-representation may reflect the low proportion of military experience among the authors – or perhaps the low proportion of army officers with literary inclinations – with only four militia officers in their number: Colonel Lewis Hough of the 3rd Battalion Royal Fusiliers, Lieutenant Colonel Gawin William Rowan Hamilton of the 3rd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, Captain Robert Campbell of the 3rd Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers, and James

¹²⁵ Conney, reviewed in *Dundee Courier and Argus*, 13 June 1895; Harwood, reviewed in *Morning Post*, 24 Dec. 1878; Dalton, reviewed in *Graphic*, 4 July 1885.

¹²⁶ Brookfield, reviewed in *Standard*, 15 Apr. 1879, *Graphic*, 19 Apr. 1879, *Morning Post*, 12 Apr. 1879.

Canby Biddle-Cope (formerly a captain in the 3rd Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment).¹²⁷ The overriding trend of the evidence, however, rather suggests that the militia's under-representation may be emblematic of the low estimate that society as a whole placed on their military value. The *Boy's Own Paper* even informed one aspiring youngster that 'You will never make a soldier. When a boy asks what time a soldier has to turn out in the morning... he is not even fit for the militia.'¹²⁸

As well as understanding these depictions in the context of the rising tide of imperialism, we should also consider the way in which they relate to the increasing professionalization of Victorian society. The militia were affected both by the general growth of pressure for public officials and army officers alike to dedicate themselves more completely to their careers, which took place over the course of the century, and specifically by the discrediting of amateur military forces in the Franco-Prussian War and the elevation of Prussian-style professionalism. However, just as professionalism had different political meanings, it also had multiple military meanings: Prussia, for example, was represented in the popular mind both by Frederick the Great's rigidly-drilled

¹²⁷ *London Gazette*, issue 25291 p.585 (27 Nov. 1883); issue 25479 p. 2682 (12 June 1885); issue 25218 p. 1781 (4 April 1883); HMSO, *Quarterly Army List for the Quarter Ending 31st December 1915* (1916) p. 2350. For Biddle Cope's book, see 'Cyprian Cope,' *At Century's Ebb* (1893). There were also a handful of regular officers (Charles Hamilton Aidé, Edward Dyne Fenton, Arthur Montagu Brookfield) and one former Yeomanry lieutenant (John Warren, 3rd Baron de Tabley).

¹²⁸ *Boy's Own Paper*, 6 Oct. 1888

automata and by the fast-moving skirmisher swarms adopted under Moltke.¹²⁹ In the militia's case, both fictionally and historically, they were frequently accused of emphasising drill over training. *Punch* described annual battalion trainings filled with parade-ground exercises as rigid as they were futile, while the commandant of the School of Musketry concluded 'most Commanding Officers like drill better than musketry, there is more pomp and circumstance about it.'¹³⁰ Though the sight of a redcoated battalion performing close order drill might inspire the young, it was also an image indelibly associated with the 'pipeclay army': the Crimean force which, during the Duke of Cambridge's 40-year tenure as Commander-in-Chief, came to be popular shorthand for unthinking military conservatism.¹³¹

By contrast, the Volunteers emphasized a looser form of discipline befitting their origins as a skirmishing force and the light infantry heritage of Sir John Moore and Shorncliffe camp.¹³² When criticized for their lack of formal discipline, they often responded by citing the intelligence of their rank-and-file

¹²⁹ For the political import of 'professionalism,' H. Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, 1997): for the Prussian army and its development, D. Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (2004).

¹³⁰ *Punch*, 26 May 1877, 22 March 1879; 'Report of the committee appointed to enquire into certain questions that have arisen with respect to the militia, together with minutes of evidence and appendices,' (Parl. Papers 1890 [Cmd. 5922], xix), paragraph 357.

¹³¹ G. St. Aubin, *The Royal George: The Life of HRH Prince George Duke of Cambridge 1819-1904* (New York, 1964), pp.132, 185, 188-90, 217-8, 319, 356-7; Spiers, *Late Victorian Army* p.264.

¹³² French pp.218-221, Beckett, *Riflemen Form* pp.175-6.

and their ethos of self-reliance.¹³³ In many respects, the military arena mirrored the political debate over franchise extension, in which there was a significant focus on finding potential voters who could be trusted to use their individual sense of judgement rather than voting *en bloc*.¹³⁴ Indeed, the educational qualification proposed by one Liberal MP – ‘some examination as a working man of ordinary intelligence might master by the sacrifice of his leisure hour at night for, say, six months’ – bore a striking resemblance to the method by which the Volunteers trained.¹³⁵ Though neither auxiliary force could match the regulars for discipline or the diffusion of Christian civilisation overseas, the greater practical military contributions of the militia were overshadowed by the way that the Volunteer ethos – ‘self-help, local pride, and patriotism, discipline, a commitment to healthy and rational recreations, and the orderly mixing of different social classes to form an organic community’ – matched the morals of the times.¹³⁶

¹³³ Colonel W.M. Angus averred ‘my drivers learned in three months what many of the Regulars take nine months to learn’: ‘Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the Militia and Volunteers, Volume 1,’ (Parl. Papers 1904 [Cmd. 2062], xxx) paragraph 7502.

¹³⁴ M. Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism* (Oxford, 1995) p.334-5 describes the move to the independent voter; see also Disraeli’s stance in R. Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867: the Making of the Second Reform Act* (Farnham, 2011) p.271-2.

¹³⁵ James Clay, in *Hull Packet*, 7 July 1865. He would later introduce a bill on this basis: J. Markham, ‘James Clay, M.P. for Hull: A Pioneering Constituency Member,’ *Northern History* vol. 36 no. 1 (May 2000) p.157

¹³⁶ French p. 247; H. Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force: A Social and Political History, 1859-1908* (1975) pp.27-8. Consider the contrast between Scotland’s wholehearted endorsement of volunteering (Beckett,

Though the social and occupational basis of Volunteer units varied from elite class corps to working-class organisations scarcely more prestigious than the militia, the practical use of Volunteering as a means of rising in the social hierarchy had no equivalent in the militia.¹³⁷ The use of militia rank as a means of social climbing described earlier in this article could not compare with the Volunteer offer of self-improvement in the quintessentially Victorian Samuel Smiles tradition. At best, militia soldiering was a means of escape from a stifling work environment: the miners and iron-founders of the 1st (South) Durham, for instance, considered the annual training a holiday.¹³⁸ While the Volunteers appeared a force in tune with the times, the popular depictions of the militia we have examined here – amateurish aristocratic officers, leading members of the unskilled working class prone to alcohol-fuelled indiscipline – echoed Victorian critiques of earlier periods. For the Victorians, the ever-present threat of the ballot meant that the militia was more easily tied in the public mind with the ‘Norman officialdom’ of the regular army than the manly Saxon self-government of the Volunteers.¹³⁹ This was, perhaps, reinforced by the number of militia

Riflemen Form pp.84-5) and the way the Scottish dialect works in n.73 above criticise the militia’s morals.

¹³⁷ Beckett, *Amateur Military Tradition* p. 179; French p. 209.

¹³⁸ *Militia and Brigade Depot committee*, Appendix II p. 410.

¹³⁹ Johnson p.61; Fulford pp.165-6

officers who came to see the ballot as the solution for the force's problems and publicly advocated its re-imposition.¹⁴⁰

The Volunteer movement would continue to evolve, from Territorial Force to Territorial Army to Army Reserve, with its increasing subjugation to government mirroring the growing role of the state and the decline in civil society over the course of the twentieth century. By contrast, the remarkable persistence of the militia's association with Georgian military tropes through the late nineteenth century suggested that popular culture saw the force as fundamentally outdated and incapable of change. Though the militia's defenders argued for its wider social and political significance as the 'old constitutional force,' in fact the phrase was emblematic of the way that the society which it represented no longer existed.

¹⁴⁰ See Lieutenant-Colonel Garnham (3rd West Riding) and Colonel Evelyn (3rd East Surrey) in Major A. D. Anderson, 'The Necessity for a Partial Enforcement of the Ballot for the Militia, and its Bearing on the Regular Army, the Yeomanry, and the Volunteers,' *JRUSI* vol. 30 no. 135 (1886), 783, 785; Colonel White-Thompson (4th Devons) in Captain R. Holden, 'The Enlistment of the Militia for Foreign Service,' *JRUSI* vol. 34 no. 153 (1890), 776; Major A. B. Williams (7th Rifle Brigade), 'The Evolution of the Militia as the Basis of the Army,' *JRUSI* vol. 41 no. 227 (1897) 31; Colonel J.D. Legard (Yorkshire Artillery Militia), 'Army Re-Organisation: With Special Reference to the Infantry of the Line and Militia,' *JRUSI* vol. 42 no. 241 (1898), 241.